

## Alfred, Lord Tennyson

### Three Poems

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) is considered the greatest English poet of the Victorian period. He became, perhaps, the first literary celebrity, becoming Poet Laureate in 1850 and being made a baron in 1884. His smooth metrics and use of blank verse hearken back to the Elizabethan poets. He wrote many memorable short lyrics but is also known for his long, anguished elegy on the death of his friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, completed in 1849 and his epic *Idylls of the King* (1859-1885).

### Ulysses (1833)

It little profits that an idle king,  
 By this still hearth, among these barren crags,  
 Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole  
 Unequal laws unto a savage race,  
 That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me. 5  
 I cannot rest from travel; I will drink  
 Life to the lees. All times I have enjoyed  
 Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those  
 That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when  
 Through scudding drifts the rainy Hyades 10  
 Vexed the dim sea. I am become a name;  
 For always roaming with a hungry heart  
 Much have I seen and known—cities of men  
 And manners, climates, councils, governments,  
 Myself not least, but honoured of them all— 15  
 And drunk delight of battle with my peers,  
 Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.  
 I am a part of all that I have met;  
 Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough  
 Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades 20  
 Forever and forever when I move.  
 How dull it is to pause, to make an end,  
 To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!  
 As though to breathe were life! Life piled on life  
 Were all too little, and of one to me 25  
 Little remains; but every hour is saved  
 From that eternal silence, something more,  
 A bringer of new things; and vile it were  
 For some three suns to store and hoard myself,  
 And this grey spirit yearning in desire 30  
 To follow knowledge like a sinking star,  
 Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.  
 This my son, mine own Telemachus,  
 To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle—  
 Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfill 35

This labour, by slow prudence to make mild  
 A rugged people, and through soft degrees  
 Subdue them to the useful and the good.  
 Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere  
 Of common duties, decent not to fail 40  
 In offices of tenderness, and pay  
 Meet adoration to my household gods,  
     There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail;  
 There gloom the dark broad seas. My mariners,  
 Souls that have toiled, and wrought, and thought with me— 45  
 That ever with a frolic welcome took  
 The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed  
 Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;  
 Old age hath yet his honour and his toil.  
 Death closes all; but something ere the end, 50  
 Some work of noble note, may yet be done,  
 Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.  
 The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;  
 The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep  
 Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends, 55  
 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.  
 Push off, and sitting well in order smite  
 The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds  
 To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths  
 Of all the western stars, until I die. 60  
 It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;  
 It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,  
 And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.  
 Though much is taken, much abides; and though  
 We are not now that strength which in old days 65  
 Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are—  
 One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Tears, Idle Tears (1847)

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,  
 Tears from the depth of some divine despair  
 Rise in the heart, and gather in the eyes,  
 In looking on the happy autumn-fields,  
 And thinking of the days that are no more. 5

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,  
 That brings our friends up from the underworld,  
 Sad as the last which reddens over one

That sinks with all we love below the verge;  
 So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more. 10

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns  
 The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds  
 To dying ears, when unto dying eyes  
 The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;  
 So sad, so strange, the days that are no more. 15

Dear as remembered kisses after death,  
 And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned  
 On lips that are for others; deep as love,  
 Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;  
 O Death in Life, the days that are no more! 20

#### The Eagle (1851)

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;  
 Close to the sun in lonely lands,  
 Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;  
 He watches from his mountain walls,  
 And like a thunderbolt he falls.